

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00  
INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03  
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 AID-05  
PC-01 OMB-01 TRSE-00 A-01 OPR-02 SY-05 OC-06  
CCO-00 /071 W  
-----141326Z 070250 /44

O P 141151Z APR 77  
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 943  
INFO AMEMBAY6 DACCA PRIORITY 2042  
AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY  
AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY  
AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY  
AQEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 6985  
CINCPAC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 3656

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, PK  
SUBJECT: THE CRISIS CONTINUES

SUMMARY: BHUTTO BROKE HIS PUBLIC SILENCE IN A BBC INTERVIEW WHICH HE KNEW WOULD BE WIDELY AND IMMEDIATELY KNOWN THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. HE WENT FARTHER THAN EVER IN CALLING FOR A DIALOGUE WITH THE PNA. ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT SPECIFICALLY STWI THAT HE WAS PREPARED TO TALK ABOUT FRESH ELECTIONS, SOMETHING HE HAS RULED OUT IN THE PAST AS NON-NEGOTIABLE, HIS LANGUAGE AS THE BBC COORESPONDENT INTERPRETED IT MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE WAS PREPARED TO HOLD DISCUSSIONS WHICH WOULD INCLUDE EVEN THAT ISSUE. THE PM MENTIONED THE DANGER OF EXTREMIST ELEMENTS AND THE POSSIBILITY OF ARMY INTERVENTION, SEEMINGLY IN PART TO PERSUADE THE OPPOSITION TO COME TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE.  
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BHUTTO'S INTERVIEW WITH BBC WILL LESSEN RUMORS THAT HE IS A VIRTUAL PRISONER, HAS VNASED MV PLAY AN ACTIVE POLITICAL ROLE, OR HAS GONE ABROAD.

THE HARD POLITICAL FACTS OF BHUTTO'S ERODING POLITICAL POSITION REMAIN AS SPELLED OUT IN OUR ASSESSMENT YESTERDAY. ALTHOUGH

DEVELOPMENTS OF THE PAST 24 HOURS SUGGEST THAT MATTERS ARE NOT AS CLOSE TO THE BRINK AS THEY HAD SEEMED -- THOUGH THIS COULD CHANGE AGAIN IF THERE IS A SERIOUS BLOWUP AGAIN TOMORROW IN LAHORE AND ELSEWHERE -- WE BELIEVE THAT THE ANALYSIS WE MADE IN THAT ASSESSMENT ALSO REMAINS VALID. END SUMMARY.

1. AS NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS OBSERVE THIS MORNING, IT WAS A MONTH AGO TODAY THAT THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE LAUNCHED ITS PROTEST MOVEMENT CALLING FOR THE RESIGNATION OF PM BHUTTO AND FRESH ELECTIONS. THE POLITICAL CRISIS CONTINUES. EARLIER RUMORS TO THE CONTRARY, THERE HAS BEEN NO SIGNIFICANT BREAK IN THE CONFRONTATION.

2. THE MOST IMPORTANT OVERT DEVELOPMENT OF THE PAST TWENTY-FOUR HOURS HAS BEEN THE BROADCAST AND SUBSEQUENT PUBLICATION IN THE PAKISTAN PRESS OF AN ACCOUNT OF AN INTERVIEW WHICH BHUTTO GAVE TO BBC CORRESPONDENT ANDREW WHITLEY IN LAHORE AT NOON WEDNESDAY. TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS INTERVIEW, ONE MUST RECALL THE ROLE THE BBC HAS ASSUMED IN PAKISTAN DURING THE POLITICAL CRISIS. IT HAS BECOME THE PRINCIPAL SOURCE OF INFORMATION FOR PAKS OF EVERY DESCRIPTIN, AND ANYTHING IT CARRIES CONCERNING PAKISTAN IN ITS NEWS BROADCAST CAN BE ASSUMED TO BE WIDELY AND IMMEDIATELY KNOWN THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. THUS IN MAKING HIS COMMENTS TO WHITLEY, BHUTTO KNEW THAT HE WAS IN EFFECT SIAKING TO HIS COUNTRYMEN.

3. WHITLEY TELLS US THAT BHUTTO'S REMARKS DURING THE 45-MINUETE INTERVIEW BEAR OUT THIS ASSESSMENT. AT TIMES, HE SAID, THE PM SEEMED TO BE SPEAKING TO THE PEOPLE, AT OTHER TIMES TO THE OPPOSITION

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TO THE ARMY, AND TO HIS WAVERING SUPPORTERS IN THE PPP. HE SEEMS TO HAVE HAD A MESSAGE FOR EACH ONE, AND HE USED THE BBC INTERVIEW AS A WAY OF GETTING IT ACROSS.

4. WHITLEY DESCRIBED BHUTTO AS NERVOUS, RED-EYED, SEEMINGLY UNDER GREAT PRESSURE. THE PM, HE TOLD US, SEEMED ON THE DEFENSIVE AND WAS OBVIOUSLY NOT SPEAKING FROM A POSITION OF STRENGTH. WHITLEY SAID THE PM AT TIMES SEEMED TO HAVE TROUBLE WITH WORDS, AND THAT HE OFTEN SEEMED LIKE AN OLD PROFESSIONAL PERFORMER PAST HIS PRIME WHO CAN REMEMBER SOME OF HIS OLD LINES BUT HAS TROUBLE IN RECALLING OTHERS. HE SAID THAT DURING THE INTERVIEW BHUTTO, DESPITE FLASHES OF HIS OLD SELF, GAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT HE WAS ALMOST PLEADING.

5. BHUTTO'S APPROACH TO THE OPPOSITION SEEMED TO BE A COMBINATION OF A REITERATION OF A CALL FOR A DIALOGUE AND A THREAT OF THE CONSEQUENCES IF SUCH A CALL WERE NOT HEEDDED. THIS COMBINATION IS, OF COURSE, A FAMILAR ONE TO THE PM. BUT THIS TIME BOTH THE NATURE

OF THE CALL AND THE SPELLING OUT OF THE CONSEQUENCES WERE  
DIFFERENT FROM PREVIOUS BHUTTO APPROACHES.

6. BY WHITLEY'S ACCOUNT, BHUTTO WENT FARTHER THAN EVER IN  
OFFERING TO ENTER A DIALOGUE WITH THE PNA. HE SAID THAT THE MOST  
IMPORTANT THING WAS TO "SORT OUT THE ELECTIONS." ALTHOUGH HE DID  
NOT SPECIFICALLY STATE THAT HE WAS PREPARED TO TALK ABOUT FRESH  
GENERAL ELECTIONS, SOMETHING HE HAS RULED OUT IN THE PAST AS NON-  
NEGOTIABLE, HIS LANGUAGE AS WHITLEY INTERPRETED IT MADE IT CLEAR  
THAT HE WAS PREPARED TO HOLD DISCUSSIONS WHICH WOULD INCLUDE EVEN  
THAT ISSUE. HE SAID THAT HE WAS PREPARED TO RELEASE THOSE  
ARRESTED IN THE AGITATION IN ADVANCE, BUT FIRST WANTED AN  
"INFORMAL GENERAL UNDERSTANDING" WITH THE PNA ABOUT THE NEED FOR  
A DIALOGUE. HE SAID HE WAS PREPARED TO MEET WITH THE OPPOSITION  
ANYTIME, ANYWHERE, AND WOULD EVEN GO TO THEM IF NEED BE. PERHAPS  
WITH A VIEW TOWARD AN ARMY OR OTHER INTERMEDIARY ROLE IN THE  
ONGOING EXCHANGES, HE TOLD WHITLEY HE PREFERRED A DIRECT DIALOGUE.  
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INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03  
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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

7. THE THREATS THAT BHUTTO HELD OUT WERE SEVERAL. HE MAINTAINED THAT THE PNA'S MOVEMENT WOULD NOT REMAIN IN THE HANDS OF THE ALLIANCE FOR LONG, AND URGED THE PNA LEADERS TO PREVENT THE COUNTRY FROM SLIPPING INTO THE HANDS OF EXTREMIST OF RIGHT AND LEFT WHO HE ALLEGED WERE CLEVERLY PARTICIPATING IN THE DISTURBANCES. (THIS MESSAGE WAS ALSO MEANT FOR THE MILITARY, IT SEEMS CLEAR.) HE SAID THAT IF THE NEED ARISES, HE WOULD CALL ON THE ARMY TO PALY A GREATER ROLE IN PUTTING DOWN THE DISTURBANCES. BHUTTO DWELLED FURTHER ON THE THEME THAT THE ARMY MIGHT BE COMPELLED TO STEP IN, TO THE DISADVANTAGE OF THE PNA, IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION. WHITLEY ASKED HIM HOW HE THOUGH THE PUNJABI SOLDIER WOULD REACT TO ORDERS TO SHOOT FELLOW PUNJABIS. BHUTTO'S REPLY WAS "IF YOU GET INTO THIS SCHOLARLY EXPOSE, THEN THE GAME IS UP AND EVERYTHING IS OVER. THEN THE WHOLE QUESTION OF ELECTIONS BECOMES ACADEMIC .. YOU AND I WILL KNOW THE CONSEQUENCES." (I.E. IF THE OPPOSITION IS CONFIDENTIAL

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SO KEEN ON MILITARY INTERVENTION, IT WILL END UP WITH NOTHING AT ALL.)

8. BHUTTO ALSO INDICATED, ONCE AGAIN, THAT HIS PATIENCE WAS NOT LIMITED AND THAT HIS BARGAINING POWER REMAINED STRONG. HE SAID HE CONTINUED TO ENJOY CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT: WORKERS, PEASANTS, WOMEN, AND THE MINORITIES WERE STILL WITH HIM. (THIS SEEMED ALSO AIMED AT PPP WAVERERS.) HE NOTED THAT WHILE HE WAS PREPARED TO CONSIDER ANYTHING REASONABLE, HE COULD NOT GO ON MAKING UNILATERAL GESTURES. (IN THIS CONTEXT, HE SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN PREPARED TO OFFER FURTHER GESTURES LAST WEEKEND, BUT HAD BEEN UNWILLING TO DO SO IN THE WAKE OF THE LAHORE DISTURBANCES SINCE THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN VIEWED AS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS.)

9. ALTHOUGH THE PAKISTAN TIMES ACCOUNT OF THE INTERVIEW STATES THAT BHUTTO SAID HE WOULD BE WILLING TO HOLD FRESH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS IF THE OPPOSITION WON A TWO-THIRD MAJORITY IN REHELD PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS, A VARIANT OF THE PROPOSAL ATTORNEY GENERAL YAHYA BAKHTIAR MADE LAST WEEKEND, WHITLEY SAID THE PM ACTUALLY SPOKE MUCH MORE VAGUELY ABOUT THIS BAKHTIAR INITIATIVE. HE MERELY SAID THAT BAKHTIAR KENW HOW THE PM OPERATED, BUT THAT THE PROPOSAL DID NOT HAVE HIS SANCTION. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT, AS NOTED ABOVE, HE WAS PREPARED TO CONSIDER ANY REASONABLE PROPOSAL.)

10. THE PUBLICATION OF THE BHUTTO INTERVIEW IN THE PRESS BROKE WHAT FOR PAK NEWSPAPER READERS WAS AN UNUSUALLY LONG ABSENCE OF THE PM FROM THE PUBLIC PRINT. IT WILL LESSEN RUMORS THAT HE IS A VIRUTAL PRIOSONER, HAS CEASED TO PLAY AN ACTIVE POLITICAL ROLE,

OR HAS GONE ABROAD. (SENIOR GOP OFFICIALS HERE TELL US THAT BHUTTO CONTINUES TO BE ACTIVE IN RUNNING AFFAIRS, AND THAT HE HAS REMAINED IN LAHORE WHERE HE WILL CHAIR A FEDERAL CABINET MEETING TOMORROW.) THE HARD POLITICAL FACTS OF BHUTTO'S DETERIORATING POLITICAL POSITHBN REMAIN AS SPELLED OUT IN OUR ASSESSMENT YESTERDAY, HOWEVER (ISLAMABAD 3590). DISTURBANCES CONTINUE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, AND WHILE THESE SEEM NO WORSE THAN EARLIER IN THE CONFIDENTIAL

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WEEK THEY SEEM TO BE BUILDING UP TO A NEW CRESCENDO TOMORROW. A TRICKLE OF PPP DEFECTIONS CONTINUES AND LISTS OF THOSE NOW EXPECTED TO BOLT ARE SAID TO BE CIRCULATING WIDELY. THE DEFECTION OF THE PAK AMABASSADOR TO MADRID, FRON PAGED IN THE NON-GOVERNMENT PRESS ON THE BASIS OF THE BBC ACCOUNT, ADDS TO THE SENSE OF DOWNWARD SLIDE.

11. ON THE OPPOSITION SIDE, ACTING PNA CHIEF NAWABZADA NASRULLAH KHAN HAS COMPLETED HIS NWFP TRIP AND IS RETURNING TO LAHORE FOR FURTHER TALKS WITH HIS FELLOW OPPOSITIONISTS. THE PRESS REPORTS THAT BOTH HE AND BEGUM WALI KHAN WHOM HE SAW IN CHARSADDA WHERE SHE IS UNDER HOUSE ARREST, WERE "TIGHTLIPPED" WHEN ASKED IF THE NAWABZADA WAS CARRYING ANY NEW FORMULA. THE IMPRESSION THIS CONVEYED IS THAT THERE IS ONE. NASRULLAH REPORTEDLY TOLD A PESHAWAR PRESS CONFERENCE THAT THE PNA WOULD CONTINUE ITS "PEACEFUL STRUGGLE" AND SAID THAT IF FORMALLY RECEIVED, THE PROPOSALS OF ATTORNEY GENERAL BAKHTIAR WOULD CERTAINLY BE CONSIDERED BY THE PNA GENERAL COUNCIL. NO OPPOSITION LEADER HAS YET REACTED PUBLICLY TO THE BHUTTO BBC INTERVIEW.

12. ALTHOUGH DEVELOPMENTS OF THE PAST TWENTY-FOUR HOURS SUGGEST THAT MATTERS ARE NOT AS CLOSE TO THE BRINK AS THEY HAD SEEMED -- THOUGH THIS COULD CHANGE AGAIN IF THERE IS A SERIOUS BLOWUP AGAIN TOMORROW IN LAHORE AND ELSEWHERE -- WE BELIEVE THAT OUR ASSESSMENT REPORTED YESTERDAY REMAINS VALID. THE ONLY REALLY NEW ELEMENTS ARE THAT BHUTTO IS NOW OFFERING A VIRTUALLY UNCONDITIONAL DIALOGUE.

AND IS EXPLICITLY WARNING THE OPPOSITION THAT IF IT DOES NOT SIT DOWN THERE COULD BE AN ARMY TAKEOVER. BUT THE LATTER SHOULD MERELY SUPPLEMENT THE EFFORTS WE BELIEVE THE MILITARY IS ITSELF MAKING TO BRING ABOUT A SETTLEMENT, AND THE FORMER MAY BE IN PART THE RESULT OF IT.  
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## Message Attributes

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